

LYNX CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. What is the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS)?

A. The LCAS is a consistent and effective approach to conserving Canada lynx based upon the best available science, produced by an interagency team of biologists (view a copy at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/wildlife/carnivore/>). The purpose of the LCAS was to recommend lynx conservation measures and to facilitate consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

Q. Why does the LCAS identify conservation measures for some activities that the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determined are not a threat lynx?

A. The LCAS described an inclusive list of 17 programs and activities under the authority and jurisdiction of Federal land management agencies that were determined to be potential risk factors in regard to conserving lynx. Conservation measures were developed for each risk factor to reduce potential effects to lynx.

Examples of risk factors include programs or practices that result in the following: habitat conversion, fragmentation, or obstruction to lynx movement; roads or winter recreation trails that facilitate access to historical lynx habitat by competitors; and fire exclusion, which changes the vegetation mosaic maintained by natural disturbance processes. One of the guiding principles used in developing the LCAS specified that where conclusive information was currently lacking, a conservative approach that retained future options would be employed.

The risk factors identified in the LCAS are based on effects to either individual lynx or populations within or across geographic areas. To be listed under the ESA, a species must meet the ESA definition of endangered or threatened. In determining whether a species should be listed under the ESA, the FWS assesses the status of the species and threats (factors identified in section 4 of the ESA) throughout its range. Although an individual lynx may be adversely affected by a risk factor identified in the LCAS, not every risk factor occurs at a level that negatively affects the overall ability of lynx populations to persist in the contiguous U.S. As a result, the FWS concluded that only some of the risk factors identified in the LCAS were considered threats to lynx and led to the subsequent listing of lynx as threatened (from Final Rule listing the lynx as threatened, Fed. Reg. March 24, 2000, p. 16078).

Q. What about concerns over packed snow trails?

A. Snow compaction is addressed in the LCAS based on information contained in Chapters 4 and 16 in *Ecology and Conservation of Lynx in the United States* (Ruggiero et al. 2000). This information identifies a potential issue that packed snow trails provide access by other predators into lynx winter habitats, enabling them to

compete with lynx. The Forest Service and BLM are using information in the LCAS and the *Ecology and Conservation of Lynx in the United States* (Ruggiero et al. 2000) to address the risk to lynx potentially posed by packed snow trails. The FWS remand acknowledged that this theory had neither been proven nor disproven. Therefore, the FWS remand concluded that packed snow trails were not considered a threat to the species at this time because no evidence had been provided that packed snow trails facilitate competition to a level that negatively affects lynx across its range.

Through the interagency Conservation Agreements (2000), the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are taking a proactive approach to the management of lynx habitat by considering the recommendations contained in the LCAS. Because definitive scientific information in regard to snow compaction effects on lynx is lacking, the Agency's approach is to maintain snow compaction at current levels until further, conclusive peer-reviewed information becomes available. There are currently two research studies underway that will help to answer this question.

Q. Will the LCAS be amended due to the clarification of findings in the Federal Register July 3, 2003, pages 40076-40101 (FWS remand)?

A. No. The LCAS is based upon the best available science, and recognizes the need for updating to reflect new scientific information (LCAS Introduction page 4). The Charter for the Lynx Biology Team established the procedures for amending the LCAS. The LCAS will be amended when research results or other relevant information suggests changes would improve conservation efforts. The FWS clarification of findings did not present any new scientific information.

References:

Ruggiero, L.F., K.B. Aubry, S.W. Buskirk (and others). 2000. **Ecology and Conservation of Lynx in the United States**. University Press of Colorado, Boulder, CO. 480p. (see Chapter 4: Habitat Fragmentation and Interspecific Competition: Implications for Lynx Conservation by S.W. Buskirk, pages 83-100 and Chapter 16: The Scientific Basis for Lynx Conservation: Qualified Insights by Ruggiero and others, pages 443-454).

Ruediger, W. et al. August, 2000. **Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy**. USDA Forest Service, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management, and USDI National Park Service. Forest Service Pub #R1-00-53, Missoula, MT. 142pp.

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